

Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee Report-April 21, 2020
Office of Agriculture- Jeremy Criss

1. The Office of Agriculture developed a COVID-19 Agricultural Business Resources published on the OAG website that is updated daily.
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ag-services/boards-committees/guidance-for-ag-business.html>

2. The County released the Public Health and Emergency Grant Program PHEG-\$20 million <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/Biz-Resources/pheg/index.html>

3. The USDA has announced the Coronavirus Assistance Program -\$19 Billion <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/04/17/usda-announces-coronavirus-food-assistance-program>

4. 2020 Maryland Legislative Session
<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/bills/hb/hb0848F.pdf>- HB 848- passed and we are waiting for the Governor's signature. The HB 848 directs proceeds from the County Agricultural Transfer Tax for ag land preservation easement purchases and other ag programs. *Please note that County action on this bill will be delayed due to the fiscal crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic.*

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/bills/hb/hb0805F.pdf>- HB 805- passed and we are waiting for the Governor's signature. The HB 805 creates a new occupancy of 100 people under Public Safety Section 12-508 and allows Montgomery County to use agricultural buildings for agricultural tourism for occupancies up to 100 people.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/bills/hb/hb0827F.pdf>- HB 827 - assigned to summer study-proposal to add rifles as acceptable firearms in Montgomery County while hunting with a deer management permit.

5. The Executive staff continues to offer virtual solar GIS mapping briefings with the County Council pertaining to the Solar ZTA 20-01. The following council members have seen this GIS mapping briefing- Hans Riemer, Tom Hucker, Will Jawando. Solar mapping briefings with the other council members are pending. The County Council introduced ZTA 20-01 to allow Community Commercial Solar in the Agricultural Reserve that proposes a total of 1,800 acres or just 2% of the Agricultural Reserve-AR zone should be allowed for larger Solar installations.

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/zta/2020/ZTA%2020-01.pdf>

6. The County Office of Agriculture was awarded a Rural Legacy Program-RLP Grant of \$2,704,500 on January 8, 2020. The Grant Agreements were executed in March however, COVID-19 pandemic may negatively the County receiving these Grants.
7. The OAG is coordinating a meeting of the agricultural agencies and staff to develop a plan for opening retail agricultural businesses. This plan will seek additional guidance from the Governor on the orders for essential businesses.
8. The OAG is working with the Food Security Task Force to assist with developing plans for COVID-19 including opportunities for expanding local food production. Several local farms have seen big increases in CSA customers as well as on-line sales for curbside pickup of local food.
9. This year marks the 40th Anniversary of the Agricultural Reserve. We will be planning for an event in the fall to celebrate this milestone with all stakeholders.
10. The OAG is working with the Council on suggested changes to the definition of agricultural education and tourism. One idea is to provide opportunities for off the grid overnight farm stays.